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HOMEMAKERS' CHAT

Thursday, July 20, 1939.

(For Broadcast Use Only)

SUBJECT: "THE BUREAU OF PLANT INDUSTRY." Information from the Bureau of Plant Industry, U. S. Department of Agriculture. Several bulletins mentioned.

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Our Washington correspondent writes today about another of the major units of the U. S. Department of Agriculture - the Bureau of Plant Industry. She has selected a few of its activities of special interest to homemakers. For the Bureau, as you know, carries on many different kinds of research in its field stations located in the important cropping regions, as well as in the Department of Agriculture the Arlington Experiment Farm, and the U. S. Horticultural Station at Beltsville, Maryland.

Our reporter writes:

"Food plants and ornamental plants are of interest to most homemakers, I believe. The Bureau of Plant Industry has a scientific staff that is constantly trying to improve the quality of the fruits and vegetables that reach the consumer's table through marketing agencies, or that can be raised in home gardens. This may mean developing strains that have a better flavor, or that can be transported in better condition. It may mean finding varieties that are more resistant to diseases and inspect pests, or those that grow best in particular regions.

"Plant breeding experiments are going on continually between varieties that have different desirable qualities. Many of the fine table products we enjoy today are the result of such efforts to improve quality. To illustrate, tomato breeding work has produced the Marglobe, Pritchard, and Break o'Day,- and we may see even finer varieties. Perhaps some of your listeners have these tomatoes in their gardens.



"Again, potato breeders are making selections of varieties that are resistant to potato scab. Commercial growers, perhaps more than home gardeners, use the results of such work, but we all eat potatoes and the many other food plants which concern the Bureau of Plant Industry. If you have seen some extra large cultivated blueberries on the market you may be interested in knowing that many years of breeding and selection by one of the Bureau's scientists are behind that unusual fruit.

"Another source of improvement in our food plants is by plant explorations. At the present day most of the expeditions are for a specific purpose, as in the recent effort to find cucurbits- that is, cucumbers, watermelons, pumpkins, edible gourds, and squash- which would be potentially valuable for their disease resistant qualities. The plant explorers went to India and Afghanistan and brought back a number of varieties formerly unknown in this country, which are being tested in some of the field stations.

"Formerly plant explorers brought in any promising new food plants they found for our growers to try, especially those that would withstand difficult climatic conditions. The date palm was started in the southwest, also figs from the Mediterranean, avocados from Mexico and Central America, bamboo and soybeans from the Orient, mangoes, chayotes, dasheens, and other semi-tropical food plants. Orange growing was early established in Florida by the Spaniards.

"Native nut trees of many kinds are also the province of the Bureau of Plant Industry. The annual pecan and walnut crops are important commercially, and almonds, filberts, black walnuts and several other kinds of nuts are shipped by their growers in carload lots. So that one of the divisions of the Bureau studies the propagation, culture, and diseases of nut trees.

"Peanuts, as you no doubt know, are legumes,- a ground crop of tremendous size and commercial value. Peanuts are used for stock feed as well as human food and for industrial purposes, too. Another legume that is eaten on the table but

that is more important as forage and as an industrial crop is the soybean. The Bureau of Plant Industry has kept pace with the phenomenal growth in soybean plantings, with its studies on desirable varieties and cultivation practices.

"Adding charm to a farmstead or to a city home by ornamental plantings is peculiarly a woman's hobby. To answer the many questions people have asked the Bureau, a number of free Farmers' Bulletins have been prepared. You may like to know what some of these are:

"Herbaceous Perennials"- No. 1381-F- includes a list of the regions where the various flowering plants will thrive best. "Growing Annual Flowering Plants"- No. 1171-F- is another that describes plants that will bloom readily when seeds or cuttings are planted. The author of the publication has also prepared tables showing what plants to use for particular color masses, and what heights different plants attain, so the amateur will know which to use for backgrounds and which for borders.

"Those who want to grow roses, lilies, chrysanthemums, dahlias, irises, or tulips, can get individual bulletins dealing with each one separately. Again, if one wants general information on improving the home surroundings, there is a bulletin on "Beautifying the Farmstead"- No. 1087-F- one on the "Planting and Care of Lawns"- No. 1677-F-, "Transplanting Trees and Shrubs"- No. 1591-F- and a little leaflet on "Rockeries"- No. 90-L. And while I'm mentioning publications I should say that there are several on the home vegetable garden and on how to raise particular fruits and vegetables."

(Speaker might run through the list of titles and numbers of bulletins again.

"I wish I had time today to tell you of some of the other activities of the Bureau of Plant Industry- how its plant explorers have searched for grasses to anchor the soil in the Dust Bowl; investigations in soil properties as they affect plant growth; and the cotton studies that look toward the development of fine long staple varieties so much in demand for cotton textiles. These topics must be saved for another occasion."

That's all of our Washington correspondent's letter.

